

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

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COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS is intended to provide quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). It is produced regularly throughout the academic year. This issue covers the months of March and April 2005.

Universities continue co-ordinated, province-wide public awareness initiative

Ontario has set out some ambitious goals to help ensure our province's continued strength, growth and quality of life. Strong universities are crucial to helping Ontario meet these goals. But with the lowest university funding per student of all Canadian provinces, and 40% lower than that at public universities in the United States, Ontario is unlikely to meet these goals.

Research has indicated that, until very recently, the large majority of the Ontario public was totally unaware of the challenges that our universities face in delivering quality education to students. It became clear that outreach was essential, and that communicating the realities of Ontario universities' current and future fiscal situation would require a co-ordinated, province-wide public awareness initiative.

The initiative, entitled *Think Ontario*, has conveyed one central, urgent message – **A Strong Ontario Needs Strong Universities** – to heighten awareness of the importance of investment among the general public and the decision-makers themselves. The message has been conveyed through a multitude of vehicles and activities: a co-ordinated campaign of letters and visits to all MPPs; meetings with local newspaper editorial boards; the production of informational literature and publications; the placement of advertisements in communities that are home to a university; the creation of a web site (www.thinkontario.com) that provides centralized, accessible information; extensive outreach to students, faculty and graduates; and pivotal grass-roots volunteer support.

The people of Ontario have generally been surprised by the facts brought to light through the *Think Ontario* initiative, and have expressed not only genuine concern but also support for the case for increased investment. Ontario universities are hopeful that the efforts of so many individuals, including members of the general public, will result in our institutions receiving funding priority in the coming budget.

Ontario universities urge the government to make a substantial investment in university quality – an investment in Ontario's future – by:

- Providing a robust student financial assistance program;
- Funding all eligible graduate and undergraduate students;
- Increasing operating grants to the average funding per student in the other nine provinces;
- Doubling graduate enrolment by 2013;
- Addressing capital requirements and deferred maintenance; and
- Investing to keep Ontario university research competitive.

Bob Rae featured speaker at OPAS Business Leaders' Forum

Former Premier Bob Rae was the featured speaker at the 2005 Business Leaders' Forum hosted by the Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills (OPAS) on February 22, 2005.

Mr. Rae, in the capacity of his latest role as Advisor to the Premier and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, discussed his recently completed review on postsecondary education in Ontario and highlighted the review's findings and recommendations that were summarized in the report *Ontario – A Leader in Learning*.

In his presentation, Mr. Rae emphasized the importance of universities and colleges to the economic strength and prosperity of Ontario, and stressed the need for government to significantly increase its investments in the province's postsecondary institutions.

Following his remarks, Mr. Rae fielded questions from the audience, which was made up of over 200 guests from the business, university and government communities.

Held at the Toronto Board of Trade, the OPAS forum was sponsored by Bell Canada.

OUAC releases stats: secondary school student applicant numbers up again

As of the beginning of April, 74,478 Ontario secondary school students have applied for full-time, first-year admission to a university in the province, representing a 2.4% increase over last year for the same time period. On average, these applicants have made fewer application choices this year, filing 335,228 application choices with the universities (a decrease of 6.7% compared to 2004).

Also as of the beginning of April, the number of non-secondary school applicants – mature students, students transferring from colleges and universities, and applicants from outside the province seeking full-time, first-year admission to an Ontario university – currently stands at approximately 37,000, representing a marginal decrease compared to 2004. In addition to this group, there are 11,000 applicants seeking admission as transfer students with advanced standing credit. The Ontario Universities' Application Centre will continue to receive and process new applications from both of these groups throughout the spring and summer months.

\$10 million in new funding to increase the number of family doctors

On March 11, 2005, the Ontario government announced that it would invest \$10 million to train more family doctors in Ontario – the first step in a proposed multi-year plan to address the province's future physician human resource requirements.

Half of this new funding will increase the number of family medicine residency positions at Ontario's five southern medical schools, resulting in 337 more family doctors ready for practice in the province by 2008 that will, in turn, provide much-needed access for hundreds of thousands more patients.

The remaining \$5 million will be shared by Queen's University's School of Medicine and the University of Western Ontario's Schulich School of Medicine to build new medical clinics to help accommodate the increased number of these positions. Family medicine residency is a two-year

postgraduate training program that graduating students must complete to become a family doctor.

The Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine is working in partnership with the provincial government to increase the number of physicians in Ontario, including those that choose a career in family medicine. A number of government-funded initiatives are already underway, including a survey of medical students to better understand how students make their future career choices and implementation of enhanced recruitment strategies by the family medicine residency programs.

Federal government, research-granting agencies represented at OCUR meeting

On April 7, 2005, the Ontario Council on University Research (OCUR), representing the Vice-Presidents Research or equivalent at Ontario universities, hosted its annual meeting in Ottawa to facilitate meetings with officials from the federal government and research-granting agencies. OCUR members met with:

- Peter Adams, MP for Peterborough, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, and Past Chair, Government Caucus on Post Secondary Education and Research;
- Carmen Charette, Senior Vice-President, Canada Foundation for Innovation;
- Dr. Michelle Gauthier, Director, Research and Policy Analysis, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada;
- Dr. John Apsimon, Executive Director, Canada Research Chairs Program;
- Dr. David Fransen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy Sector, Industry Canada;
- Janet Halliwell, Executive Vice-President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; and
- Christian Sylvain, Director, Corporate Policy and Planning, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

At a dinner held the preceding evening at Ottawa's National Arts Centre, OCUR members were also able to meet with Dr. Gilles Paquet, President of the Royal Society of Canada.

Interactive, electronic version of *INFO* magazine in development

INFO magazine is the guide to Ontario universities for secondary school students. First published by the universities over 20 years ago as an admissions guide for counsellors, *INFO* has evolved into a centralized university admissions resource for all Ontario students as well as counsellors, providing comprehensive information on programs, admission requirements and application timelines. For the last 11 years, the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) has published the magazine, which has grown into two editions: the fall edition for students and counsellors, and the spring edition for counsellors only.

A working group representing various stakeholder groups was established to help ensure *INFO*'s continued effectiveness. The result of the review was the conception of *E-INFO* – a dynamic, interactive platform designed for its primary users (students, counsellors and parents). Moving beyond a mere electronic version of the published magazine, the *E-INFO* web site will provide its users with regularly updated information as well as powerful search tools to filter and access needed information.

In March 2005 the *INFO* Editorial Board approved the Centre's detailed project plan, which sets out specific, measurable steps and goals to guide and complete *E-INFO* within the next two years.

The prototype of the *E-INFO* web site is now being developed by OUAC and will be available online by October 2005, offering search features for the popular Degree Locator and Programs of Study charts. Students and other users will be able to comment on the site's functionality during the 2005-2006 school year. (The spring edition of *INFO* will be changed to a more condensed format, starting with *INFO 70* in March 2006.)

By October 2006 a subsequently modified *E-INFO* web site will be available online, and by September 2007 it is expected that the *E-INFO* web site will officially "go live."

Feedback from students, other users and universities will guide every stage of *E-INFO*'s development. This extensive and collaborative process will help to ensure that ultimately the web site will best serve all its stakeholders in its ability to deliver timely, accurate information.

In production...

In production is the latest version of the *Resource Document*, which provides, in summary form, analyses of statistics and trends related to Ontario universities across a range of policy areas. The comprehensive publication is expected to be published sometime in early summer.

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